

General Petraeus, Ambassador Crocker Deliver Iraq Report

Knowing your interest in national defense and international relations, I wanted to take the liberty of sharing my reaction to General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker's testimony before Congress this week.

General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker provided a thorough assessment of the situation in Iraq. I believe they expressed an understanding of the challenges in Iraq and of what it will take to secure and stabilize this young democracy.

As they discussed, the Petraeus Security Plan has helped bring forth significant security improvements in Anbar Province and Baghdad. Al Qaeda in Iraq is steadily running out of friends as moderate Sunnis who reject their extremist ideology have joined coalition forces in the fight against violent Islamic jihadism. I am encouraged by the General's testimony that Anbar Province has been transformed from al Qaeda in Iraq's primary sanctuary and a hotbed for violence against U.S. forces, to a relatively calm region that provides a blueprint for future successes in Iraq. General Petraeus testified that al Qaeda is now 'off balance' in Iraq. I strongly believe it would be a terrible mistake to reduce the pressure against these jihadists just as U.S. forces and Iraqi civilians are gaining traction in the effort to defeat them.

Equally important, I am encouraged by the General's testimony that sectarian violence in Baghdad is down considerably and that Iraqi Security Forces, especially the Army, continue to grow in number and skill. This time one year ago some believed Iraq was on the verge of an all-out civil war. Now, radical Shiite militia leader Muqtada al Sadr has apparently left Iraq and instructed his subordinates to stop attacking U.S. forces and Iraqis. I agree with General Petraeus' assessment that violence remains too high. But the considerable decline in sectarian revenge killings that has occurred since the General took command bolsters my confidence that we have made important security gains because of the 'surge' and that securing Iraq is possible. All Americans can be incredibly proud of the remarkable men and women in our military who have played an essential role in achieving these security gains.

I am deeply alarmed by General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker's straightforward characterization of Iran's continued involvement in Iraq. The General's proclamation that Iranian Special Forces are fighting a 'proxy war' against U.S. troops and are training Iraqi Shiite extremists demonstrates the dangers and goals of the radical Iranian regime. As Ambassador Crocker noted, Iranian president Ahmadinejad has already declared that he is 'prepared to fill the gap' of a potential 'power vacuum' in Iraq. Iran is clearly working to defeat the United States

in Iraq and to expand their influence in the Middle East. This reality, coupled with their pursuit of nuclear weapons, demonstrates why we must be prepared to counter Iranian forces operating in Iraq, and why the international community must respond effectively to Ahmadinejad's continued defiance and the clear threat to U.S. security and regional stability that his radical regime represents.

I also appreciate Ambassador Crocker's assessment about the difficulty in passing key legislation, such as an oil revenue-sharing plan, aimed at reconciling the Iraqi people. While the Iraqi government has taken steps toward building support for critical political compromises, I am disappointed by the Iraqi government's inability thus far to enact them. Prime Minister Maliki's government must represent all Iraqis and must redouble their commitment and efforts to push reconciliation legislation forward. As Ambassador Crocker pointed out, our own nation's history demonstrates that the path to lasting security and equal rights for all can be difficult and slow. But I believe the Ambassador was correct in also pointing out that meaningful government action is necessary to unite Iraqis of all ethnic and religious backgrounds. As the Ambassador further stated, the Iraqi people will ultimately determine their future.

Like all Americans, I want the men and women of our armed forces to return home as soon as possible. I was encouraged by General Petraeus' recommendation that some troops can begin returning home later this year, with the amount of U.S. forces returning to 'pre-surge' levels by next summer. While it is my hope that more troops return home soon, I will continue to listen closely to the recommendations of General Petraeus and other commanders on the ground in Iraq. I believe it would be an unspeakable tragedy if U.S. forces withdrew from Iraq prematurely and the tremendous sacrifices of our nation's servicemembers and their families were to be in vain. The best way to honor the Americans who have fallen or been wounded in Iraq is for our nation to succeed there.

With al Qaeda in Iraq on the run but still dangerous and still determined to establish a region of terror, and Iran clearly working to expand its theocratic ideology and to dominate the world's most volatile region, I continue to believe that success in Iraq is critical to our national security. A democratic and secure Iraq will be a strong ally of the United States in the war against radical jihadists. General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker both clearly outlined the consequences of failure in Iraq, and expressed their belief that a stable Iraq is possible. It is important that we continue their efforts to improve the situation in Iraq. [Share your thoughts](#)

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